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May 29, 2019

Secretary, SPC on Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services

Dear Committee:

**Re: Development of the Swale – Northeast Swale Working Group  
(File No. CK. 4205-40)**

On March 11, 2019 the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services resolved that the report *Development of the Swale – Northeast Swale Working Group Update* be forwarded to the Saskatoon Environmental Advisory Committee (SEAC) for information. On May 9, 2019 SEAC received a presentation from Richard Huziak, a representative for the Northeast Swale Watchers, when he expressed concern over Saskatchewan's proposed Saskatoon bypass freeway through the Northeast Swale and Small Swale (collectively referred to as 'The Swale'). SEAC resolved to have the Greenhouse Gas Subcommittee draft a **letter of concern** to City Council.

Subsequently, Saskatoon Environmental Advisory Committee notes that the Saskatoon Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee has also requested the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development & Community Services designate The Swale a heritage site.

Since the City approved the routing of this section of the freeway in **February 2006<sup>1</sup>**, information about the importance and sensitivity of The Swale has become known. **We advise City Council to engage the Provincial Government to reconsider the proposed route and ensure appropriate protection of this critical habitat.** Specific recommendations are provided on the next page.

A recent report released by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services<sup>2</sup> notes that more than **85% of wetlands present in 1700 had been lost by 2000** and up to **one in eight species on Earth are threatened with extinction**. The report's authors ranked the five direct drivers of change in nature; the culprits are, in descending order **changes in land and sea use; (2) direct exploitation of organisms; (3) climate change; (4) pollution and (5) invasive alien species.**

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<sup>1</sup> Having reviewed minutes of discussion in 2018, 2008, and 2006, this is SEAC's understanding of the history of the approvals.

<sup>2</sup> IPBES Media Release (updated), May 23, 2018 - *Biodiversity and Nature's Contributions Continue Dangerous Decline, Scientists Warn*, <https://www.ipbes.net/news/media-release-updated-biodiversity-nature-s-contributions-continue-dangerous-decline-scientists>

The report also notes that the negative trends in biodiversity and ecosystems will undermine progress towards 80% of the targets of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, related to poverty, hunger, health, water, cities, climate, oceans and land. **Loss of biodiversity is therefore shown to be not only an environmental issue, but also a developmental, economic, security, social, and moral issue as well.**

**The Swale is a precious natural grassland**, and an example of the grasslands of the Great Plains which are widely considered to be the most endangered ecosystem in North America. Specifically, The Swale is:

- A 26 km long expanse of **wind-swept prairie and species-rich wetlands**, stretching from the river, east across city limits into the RM of Corman Park.
- One of the **largest surviving remnants of ancient grassland in central Saskatchewan**, making it a critical refuge for many rare and threatened species.
- **Habitat for over 100 bird species, 200 plant species, and dozens of mammals and species at risk**, including the official bird of Saskatchewan, the Sharp-tailed Grouse. A sensitive mating ground (i.e. Lek) is located just north of the presently defined Swale. Species at risk found in the Swale include the Northern Leopard Frog, Loggerhead Shrikes, Short-eared Owl, Yellow Rail, and the Little Brown Bat.
- **An important heritage site**, as noted by the Heritage Advisory Committee, with bison rubbing stones, lime kilns, and sections of the Moosewoods Batoche trail.
- A unique and desirable **draw for residents and tourists alike**, providing nature trails and education to countless students.

Saskatoon Environmental Advisory Committee is concerned about the potential for a multi-lane high-speed freeway to cut through this important natural area. **We advise City Council to engage the Provincial Government to reconsider the proposed route and ensure appropriate protection of this critical habitat.** Please note the following specific recommendations:

- **Urge appropriate ecological studies of the region and ensure the route and design reflects the outcomes of these studies.** We note that minimal environmental study was completed when the original route was chosen. Since this time, the importance and sensitivity of The Swale has become known and yet, a full field survey of its importance across jurisdictional boundaries has not been completed, and to the best of our knowledge, is not planned. SEAC believes that the proposed desktop survey is unlikely to be sufficient to fully characterize The Swale.

- **Inform route selection and design with the study of the impacts of McOrmand**  
Dr. SEAC notes that 7 deer kills (of a population of approx. 50) occurred in the first three months the road was open, despite efforts to slow traffic. SEAC recommends the City study the impacts of the existing roadway, including the effectiveness of protection measures taken.
- **Reconsider City support for the route.** We understand that City Council previously approved the location of the proposed Freeway in **February 2006**; however, since this time, the importance and sensitivity of The Swale has become known. We believe Council has the ability to reconsider this decision and we urge you to do so, accounting for the heritage and environmental importance of The Swale.
- **Ensure design reflects protection of this important habitat.** In the unfortunate event that the current route remains, we urge City Council to ensure that every and all practical measure (e.g. wildlife bypasses, fencing, traffic calming, dark-sky lighting) are employed within the design in order to limit degradation of The Swale and ensure ecological preservation.

I recently took my family for a walk in the Swale. Family members from out of town were struck by the peacefulness and natural beauty, and my young children (4 and 2 years old) were excited by the constant birds swooping overhead. These landscapes are a unique and rare draw to Saskatoon and have significant value that cannot be replaced. If you have not done so recently, I urge you to go explore this area before considering your response to this request.

Kindest Regards,



*for* **Sara Harrison, Chair**  
Saskatoon Environmental Advisory Committee

SB:rnr